

CHILD WELFARE IN *Newsletter* PROGRESS

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REVIEW AFTER 20 YEARS LEADS TO CHANGE IN ACT

A new Child Welfare Act (Bill 35) will be implemented in Alberta on July 1, 1985. The new legislation will bring significant changes to the child welfare system in the province. Its major emphasis is on the "support and preservation of the family" and requires that the department of Social Services practice "least intrusive" measures while ensuring delivery of adequate protective and other services to children in Alberta.

There were several major factors leading to the decision to change the Child Welfare Act, explains Denis Bell, Assistant Director of the Child Welfare Implementation Project – a government unit set up to put the new legislation in motion.

"The present legislation was passed in 1965. Many people recognized that, after 20 years, there was a need to review the legislation, and that there were areas of the child welfare system that should be assessed and developed further to keep pace with changes that were occurring."

Bell said a lot of changes have already been made to improve some aspects of the system. The present legislation provides a broad continuum of good services to "neglected children", he said, but it has come to be viewed as some-

times resulting in intervention that is too intrusive, inappropriate, and in some cases unnecessary.

"The logical response was for the government to look at the system, and at the Act, and for the past five years or so changes have been occurring in the system. Bill 105, introduced in the legislature in late 1983, called for potential amendments which reflected some of that," he said.

Another part of the government's response, Bell said, was the Cavanagh Review Board whose terms of reference included a review of the Child Welfare Act.

The Board discussed issues with many groups and individuals in Alberta and outside the province. The major findings of the Board regarding the legislation have been incorporated in the new Act.

The intent and principles of the new legislation include: support and preservation of the family as the basic unit of society; recognition and protection of the rights of children; and an intent to practice "least intrusive" measures. The Act recognizes that a child has a right to express an opinion on matters affecting him/her; and expresses the philosophy that every child should have the opportunity to be a

wanted and valued member of a family. It gives direction to maintain, wherever possible, the child's familial, cultural, social and religious heritage; and recognizes the benefits to the child of stability and continuity of care and relationships. It provides for a weighing of the risks/merits of the child remaining with, or being removed from, his/her family; and for the use of, and referral to, community resources as a desired alternative to more intrusive intervention.

Specifically, the Act provides for introduction of a Children's Guardian; private and joint guardianship; privatization of non-ward adoptions; open court, with more discretion and responsibilities to the court and shorter timelines for court appearances. It allows the Minister to appoint individuals as directors, and to appoint one or more Appeal panels. Special consideration is given to Indian children, and to the delivery of services to handicapped children without the requirement that they be in need of protective services. A passive post-adoption registry is introduced. Finally, the Act provides the opportunity to share information with involved and interested parties.

Well before the passing of the

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PARTNERS IN CHILD WELFARE ASKED TO COMMENT ON ACT

Initiators of Alberta's new Child Welfare Act see the proposed system as a partnership comprised of children and their families, the community and the government. Working toward a common goal, which is "to provide a balance between the need to protect children and a desire to recognize and respect the responsibilities of families," the partners are expected to offer input as the system evolves.

This month, a summary of proposed regulations was widely circulated, with response being sought from Social Services department staff and from individuals and associations who have reason to be influenced by or interested in the child welfare system.

"Because of the size and complexity of the family and children's services system, many areas require development over a three to five-year period," says Michael Ozerkevich, Deputy Minister for Social Services. "Extensive consultation, both internal and external, is planned in order to put in place a system that truly signifies a 'new partnership' between the department, its staff, families and children, provincial associations, community agencies, foster parents and other interested or affected individuals."

As part of this process, Ozerkevich has widely circulated copies of the proposed regulations which may be created under the new Child Welfare Act. The Act provides for possible development of regulations in 21 areas, five of which require immediate attention. The document includes an overview of these areas and a summary of the other possible areas where regulations could be introduced.

All those organizations and individuals in receipt of the Proposed Regulations document (dated December 27, 1984) are urged to forward their response as quickly as possible, as the deadline for submissions has been set at February 15, 1985.

Written comment may be submit-

ted by February 15, 1985, directly to M. Ozerkevich, Office of the Deputy Minister of Social Services, Seventh Street Plaza, 10030-107 Street, Edmonton, Alberta, T5J 3E4. Any

agency or organization wishing further information about the regulations or how to respond can call Helen Wentz or Denis Bell, 422-5187 (Edmonton).

CHILD WELFARE PROGRESSING

A number of events and activities have occurred since the passing of the Child Welfare Act (Bill 35) on May 31, 1984. Reports by Dr. R. Thomlison and Judge W. White have been received which reinforce the direction in which the Alberta Department of Social Services and Community Health is proceeding. The department is fully supporting the implementation of the Act and the re-design of family and children's services with the dedication of significant human and financial resources; and the Child Welfare Implementation Project team, representing a range of experience and expertise from the department, has been assembled to develop strategies and policies for the implementation of the Act.

Specific changes have already been initiated. An extensive case review/audit of temporary and permanent wards in the various regions of the province is being undertaken which will result in the identification of children potentially "at risk" and ensure a plan of care for them. Monies have been re-allocated within the budget to support plans to provide individual care for specific children as needed and to assist families.

A Residential Replacement Program has been developed which provides funding to operate child care programs within the various regions of the province. Proposals include an intent to provide individual, non-institutional care; provision of care within, or close to, the child's home; and emphasis on reuniting the family.

An action-oriented committee has been designated to address Native/Metis issues. This includes a native apprenticeship program and a native awareness program. There is inter-departmental involvement,

and participation by Indian groups and individuals and Indian and Northern Affairs, Canada.

A Children's Mental Health system is in the planning stage. Also, an inter-departmental committee is reviewing the assessment/treatment needs of children and will recommend appropriate action. The Handicapped Children's Services program is under review and will be modified to reflect the new Act and philosophy of the department. Finally, a competition for Children's Guardian has been held and an appointment is expected this month. Regional Children's Guardians will be selected for each of the six regions of the province.

The Child Welfare Implementation Project Director is accountable for meeting the terms of reference of the project, and will be responsible and have authority for project activities. That responsibility includes ensuring that the implementation process is proceeding in a planned, co-ordinated and integrated manner; directing all aspects of the process including the management of the project teams and individual projects and tasks; and conveying policy options, resource requirements, and progress to the Steering Committee for resolution as necessary.

The Project Director is assisted in discharging these responsibilities by a full-time Project Team which forms the nucleus of the implementation process. The Project Team has developed workplans for the project; undertaken some of the specific projects identified in the workplans, or drawn on other resources as necessary; co-ordinated the activities of projects; ensured consistency among all the sub-projects and documented the implementation process.

SCOPE AND GOALS OF THE PROJECT AS BROAD AS TOTAL SYSTEM

In August, 1984, Jeremy Posner, consultant to the Child Welfare Implementation Project, outlined the scope and goals of the Project in a paper. The following summary of the salient points of the paper gives a clear overview of the Child Welfare Implementation Project.

The scope of the Child Welfare Implementation Project is as broad and extensive as the child welfare system itself, encompassing all aspects of the administration of the Child Welfare Act and the provision of services and programs to children. The enactment of such a major piece of legislation sets the direction and provides the foundation for the comprehensive reconstruction of the child welfare system in Alberta.

Several efforts have been made to detail the numerous issues in child welfare that the Act is intended to address. For example, in the early stages of the drafting of legislation, a paper identified 107 separate issues that required legislative attention. Other departmental documents, in part prepared in response to the Cavanagh Commission on Child Welfare, in part in response to issues identified by the department's own staff, and in part in response to issues identified by the public, have indicated more areas that warrant change.

Since the implementation project was set up, the Deputy Minister of Social Services asked for a re-scoping of the child welfare implementation project for which would expand its mandate to include additional goals. The whole area of child welfare was reviewed again by a group of regional and central staff, providing an opportunity for a broad scale review and generating a wide-ranging list of subjects that required attention.

The goals of the child welfare implementation project are: to assure the design, development and implementation of a rational, coherent children's services system that will support and realize the principles, intents and requirements



Michael Ozerkevich, Deputy Minister
Alberta Social Services and Community Health.

of the new Child Welfare Act; to develop the regulations required to administer the new legislation; and to ensure that those regulations and delivery system components that are essential for the basic administration of the new Act are implemented. Short and long term goals have been developed with target dates of July 1, 1985 for short-term priorities and some required changes and modifications in place by June 30, 1987 and others by June 30, 1989.

In both the short and long term, the project intends to ensure that the process of design, development and implementation is undertaken in a manner that is consistent with a philosophy of effective and efficient service provision to children and their families, supported by good management and planning and evaluation; participation by a wide cross-section of staff within the department; and consultation with the groups and interested parties affected by the changes.

The intention takes into consideration the intent and practice of decentralization and delegated deci-

sion-making within the department as well as responsibility and sensitivity both to the broad Alberta community of which the department is a part and to the individual communities in which it functions.

The Child Welfare Implementation Project will proceed under the direction of a Steering Committee, whose members are the Deputy Minister of Social Services Mike Ozerkevich (Chairman); the Associate Deputy Minister of Service Delivery Catharine Arthur; and the assistant Deputy Minister of Policy Program and Development, John Lafrance.

This committee is responsible for ensuring that there is a process in place that will enable the project to attain its goals; the supervision of the management of the implementation process; resolving policy issues as they arise during the course of the project; and ensuring that all groups and interested parties, both within and external to the department, have a visible opportunity to be heard during the course of the project.

Review After 20 Years Leads to Change in Act

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new legislation, the department began to get ready. "Six or eight committees were set up and people began to work, looking at implementing the changes to come," says Denis Bell. "They were looking at all areas: new policies that would have to be developed or approved, program standards; development of regulations; implementation tasks like training of staff and orienting people outside the department; changes in our information system; and some organizational changes like the new Children's Guardian. At that time our primary focus was implementing the new Act.

"When the new deputy minister, Mike Ozerkevich, came in July, he looked at the planning and implementation process and decided it should be expanded. Not only should the new Act be implemented but we should be taking the broader long-range view and addressing other major issues of the child welfare system. We needed to ensure that we have the type of child welfare system in place to compliment the intent and principles of the new legislation.

"Mike wanted the project redesigned and he wanted full-time resources put on the project, more priority given to it, and a mechanism put in place to make that happen."

The result was the Child Welfare Implementation Team, a group gathered from around the province to manage what has become a giant project with a scope not just of a few months but of three to five years. Led by project director Helen Wentz (formerly regional director, Central Region), with assistant project director Denis Bell (formerly an acting director of Child Welfare and more recently the district office manager of Hys Centre in Edmonton) and co-ordinated by Teresa Pickering (previously regional manager, Support Services, Central Region), the team has six project managers responsible for a variety of short and long term

sub-projects. These team members each have experience either in child welfare/children's services programs or relevant government administration, with a wide range of complementary expertise.

Project managers Don Alexander, Bill Cunes, Celeste Grad, Mat Hanrahan, Sheldon Maerov, and Dennis Maier will be assisted by regional representatives, two from each of the six departmental regions, who will work within their regions co-ordinating such areas as training of child welfare staff, liaison between the project and the regions, consultation with various groups, and a comprehensive case review of temporary and permanent ward files.

The regional representatives assigned to the project are: *Northwest*, George Kallay, Rob Lumb; *Northeast*, Judy Maggs, Jim MacNeill; *Edmonton*, Ted McCrae, Val Kinjerski; *Central*, Dave Rolfe, Alyson Lavers; *Calgary*, Gary Brayton, Dennis Switzer; *South*, Gloria Dummitt, Ann Moore.

What will this mean to the worker and the person in the street? Bell replies: "The front lines are the key to ensuring that the philosophy and intent of the project are put in place. The activities of the project, especially the long-term activities, can all be seen as supportive of front-line staff to enable and assist them to better carry out their responsibilities."

And as for families and the community: "The combination of the new Act and the project activities will increasingly improve the service to families. And there really is an intention, certainly philosophically and in the legislation, to involving the community more in the child welfare system. It anticipates a new kind of partnership between the

child welfare system and the community.

"One of the difficulties we have had in the child welfare system is that we haven't had a strong enough base of community support and partnership. The new legislation recognizes that need, identifies a strong relationship between community and child welfare system as desirable, and identifies ways to proceed."

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